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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: KURDS HOLDING FIRM ON FLAG, CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Senior Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Council of Representatives (CoR) member Saadi al-Barzinji said on September 7 that he could not understand the U.S. Embassy's reaction to Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani's statement on flying the 1958 Iraqi flag rather than the "Saddamist/Baathist flag." The Kurds' refusal to fly the current flag was a long-standing issue, and - using what seems to be the primary talking point on this issue - demanded why the flag issue received so much attention when the same clause in the Iraqi Constitution also mentioned the national anthem, which was never used since it was also a Saddam-era relic. PolOff replied that the Embassy objected to the unilateral manner in which Barzani made his announcement, without consultation with the CoR.

¶2. (C) Although Barzinji accepted the criticism on Barzani's behalf for not consulting the CoR, he pointed out that the Prime Minister had taken on the issue, and on September 6 had created a special committee on redesigning the Iraqi flag, complete with a nationwide competition for designs. He also brushed aside rumors that the Kurds had deliberately brought up the flag issue to raise the stakes on Constitutional review. (COMMENT: When asked directly, Barzinji stated that the Kurds had no problems with Constitutional review, as long as it did not decrease regional authorities - especially on natural resources. Other than that, there were plenty of areas where the vague language of the Constitution could be amended. The key thing, Barzinji argued, was to choose carefully which articles in the Constitution would be proposed for amendment. He warned that the wrong choice - i.e., tackling controversial issues such as natural resources - could result in the embarrassment of the amended Constitution failing at the polls.

¶3. (C) Barzinji then asked what was the U.S. Embassy's position on a Shia federal region. Without waiting for a response, however, Barzinji stated that the Kurds did not feel comfortable with the concept of a "two-pronged system" - if the Kurds were allowed to have a federal region, other groups should also be allowed this opportunity. The Shia's plan for a 9-province federal region was in flux, he said, and the debate within the Shia Coalition between those who favored this plan (SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and his family) and those who did not (senior SCIRI member Sheikh Humam Hammudi) was growing sharper every day.

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COMMENT

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¶4. (C) Saadi Barzinji is one of the Kurdistan Alliance's

(KAL) key decisionmakers in the Council of Representatives, as well as one of the senior Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) members in the KAL. When former Deputy Prime Minister Rowsch Shaways is not in attendance, Barzinji is the one who transmits the opinions and wishes of KDP leader and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani. Barzinji is a hard-liner even within the fairly nationalistic KDP - which makes his quiet acceptance of some criticism on the flag issue all the more significant an admission of the KRG's awareness that they handled this issue poorly.

SPECKHARD